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ABSTRACT

Project WorkAbility is a California program serving special education secondary and postsecondary students. The model design for WorkAbility is based on well-known transition models and contains components common to those models. The design views transition as both a process and a product, supports interagency cooperation and collaboration, and calls for development of individual transition plans. Program components include a curriculum featuring life skills for independent living, job analysis, on-the-job training, frequent work evaluation, 2-year postsecondary follow-up, and staff advocates for students. Although each project is locally controlled, the state-managed project design affords communication of information and problem solving among all project sites. Project strength comes from state and local level interagency collaboration, statewide partnerships with industry, and leadership from the State Department of Education. Includes five references. (JDD)

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PROJECT WORKABILITY: CALIFORNIA'S SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Project WorkAbility, now in its ninth year, has served more than 60,000 students, in 56 of California's 58 counties by a total of 158 projects statewide since 1981. WorkAbility I serves special education secondary students, while WorkAbility II and III serves post-secondary. Student evaluations are on-going during service, and follow-ups continue for two years after high school. Project strength comes from state and local level interagency collaboration in serving students. The model design for WorkAbility is based on well-known transition models and contains components common to those models. Although each project is locally controlled, the state managed project design has afforded communication of information and problem solving that has benefitted all project sites. Statewide partnerships with industry strengthen project-employer ties at all levels. The WorkAbility Government Relations Committee provides valuable contacts and support for ongoing legislative project funding.

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INTRODUCTION

Project WorkAbility began in 1981 as a model project authorized and financed by the California State Department of Education in response to the lack of secondary transition services in California high schools. The California state legislature authorized the program. Its funding is shared between Vocational Education (Carl Perkins) and Special Education (94-142) monies. All of WorkAbility's 158 projects are locally controlled, but project guidelines ensure that a large portion of the funds go directly for student stipends for on-the-job training. Project WorkAbility's success is due in part to a shared interagency transition philosophy, statewide program endorsement by other organizations, such as the California Association of Work Experience Educators (CAWEE), the California Association of Vocational Educators (CAVE), and the California Chapter of the Division on Career Development, Council for Exceptional Children, statewide partnerships with industry, and strong, visionary leadership in the State Department of Education.

Background

During the 1970's, two pieces of federal legislation, PL 94-142 and PL 95-207 were passed and implemented, affecting the fields of special , vocational, and career education. These laws, along with PL 98-524 (Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act) passed in 1984 have greatly increased the emphasis within education to prepare children and youth with disabilities for living in the adult world.

Transition programs that teach employment and community living skills meet the needs of disabled adolescents and young adults in helping them successfully bridge the gap between school and integrated competitive employment. Project WorkAbility was

conceived in the late seventies by the California State Department of Education (DOE) following a needs assessment conducted among work experience educators in that state. The study concluded that work experience education needs for the disabled students were not being filled. The state legislature authorized expenditure of funds for development of a transition pilot program to be implemented in selected secondary schools. An interagency transition philosophy was developed and the project model designed.

WorkAbility Model Development

Development of the WorkAbility model was based on several well- known transition models, including Clark's (1980), OSERS' (Will,1984), Halpern's (1985), and Wehman's (et al. 1985). There are three common elements among these models (Botterbusch, 1989). First, transition is both a process and a product. The process includes providing the support needed for people with disabilities to become integrated into the adult community as much as possible. The product is successful adjustment to adult community living. The second element is interagency cooperation and collaboration. The linkage between rehabilitation education services is especially important. Third, an individual transition plan (ITP), similar to an individualized education plan (IEP) or an individualized rehabilitation plan, is needed to guide the individual from school through rehabilitation services. A student should have an ITP by age 16.

Botterbusch (1989) created a list of twelve recommended transition program components. These components include 1) the need for ITPs, 2) holistic planning for each student, 3) pragmatic, tangible goals, 4) program goal of competitive employment, or as close as possible, 5) involvement of other community agencies,

6) use of job and task analysis techniques to determine job requirements and to select appropriate workers for the job, 7) intensive on-the-job training, using applied behavior analysis techniques, 8) continuous staff assessment of worker after job placement, 9) communication between staff and employers/supervisors to establish interpersonal relationships, 10) continued advocacy after job placement, 11) the provision of program funding for long-term follow-up, and 12) program funding to provide staff time for program evaluation. All twelve components are consistent with the WorkAbility program, as illustrated below.

WORKABILITY TRANSITION PROGRAM COMPONENTS

1. All students involved in the program have IEP goals and objectives specific to their involvement in the program. ITPs are developed initially as an addendum to the IEP, then stand alone during the student's final months before exiting secondary school.

2. The WorkAbility curriculum involves life skills for independent living. Social and emotional issues are addressed as well, and any interventions to assist the student with work adjustment are supplied.

3. The IEP goals spell out pragmatic, tangible goals.

4. The goal for all mild and moderately handicapped students is fully integrated competitive employment. Depending on the student's abilities, this is approximated as closely as possible.

5. Department of Rehabilitation, the Community College System, and private service agency representatives attend IEP meetings when possible.

6. Job analysis is done for all students prior to placement. Task analysis is done as needed for individual students. Job-worker matches are handled individually.

7. On-the-job training is done as needed for students. Job coaches are available as needed for the moderate and severe students.

8. Follow-up and work evaluation occurs at least twice a semester, but can be daily if needed for some students. All students in the program attend a support class to learn best ways to cope with job problems.

9. Relationships are established with employers during follow-ups.

10. Staff advocates for students throughout their tenure in the program.

11. Two-year post-secondary follow-up is built into the program.

12. Evaluation is done at the state level with input provided from each local project. Regional meetings held throughout the state address program barriers and provide a communication link to other projects.

PROGRAM

Description of Program

The WorkAbility program provides comprehensive pre-employment, employment, and work-site training and follow-up for adolescents and young adults with disabilities who are making the transition from school to work. It is sponsored by the California State Department of Education and is a component of the Education Transition Center within the Division of Special Education. The WorkAbility program has three components, each serving students from a different setting.

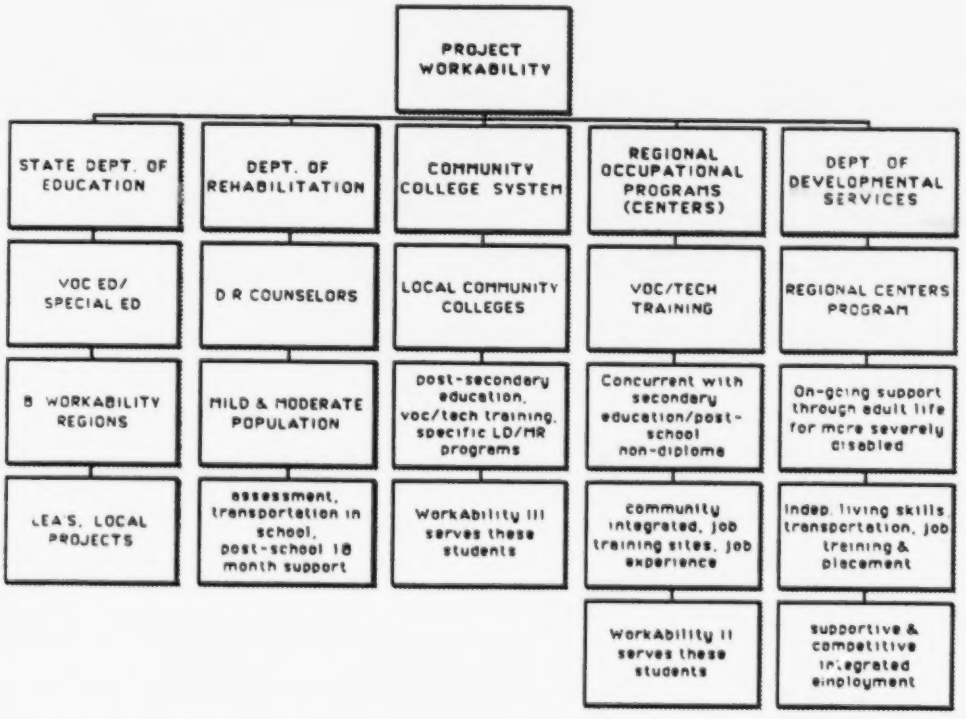
WorkAbility I is a program designed to serve students enrolled in special education programs in secondary schools. Currently, nine years after WorkAbility I began, the project has served more than 60,000 students, in 56 of 58 California counties, with a current total of 158 individual project sites.

WorkAbility II was implemented in the 1985-86 school year to serve young adult students with disabilities who were eligible to become Department of Rehabilitation clients. WorkAbility II serves primarily students who participate in Regional Occupational Centers/Programs (ROC/P's) or Adult Education. This program is funded by the Department of Rehabilitation.

WorkAbility III, initiated in December of 1985 by the California Community College Chancellor's Office, is similar to both

WorkAbility I and II in that it has competitive employment as an end goal. It involves special needs students who are enrolled in a community college program. The adults served by WorkAbility III range in age from 18 through 50 and older.

INTERAGENCY PARTNERSHIPS SERVING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS


PROJECT WORKABILITY
STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION
DEPT. OF REHABILITATION
COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM
REGIONAL OCCUPATIONAL PROGRAMS (CENTERS)
DEPT. OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES
VOC ED/ SPECIAL ED
D R COUNSELORS
LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES
VOC/TECH TRAINING
REGIONAL CENTERS PROGRAM
8 WORKABILITY REGIONS
MILD & MODERATE POPULATION
post-secondary education, voc/tech training, specific LD/MR programs
Concurrent with secondary education/post-school non-diploma
On-going support through adult life for more severely disabled
LEA'S, LOCAL PROJECTS
assessment, transportation in school, post-school 18 month support
WorkAbility III serves these students
community integrated, job training sites, job experience
Indep. living skills transportation, job training & placement
WorkAbility II serves these students
supportive & competitive integrated employment

The state and local interagency partnerships which exist among regular, special, and vocational educators and the staffs in the various divisions within the State Departments of Education, Employment Development, and Rehabilitation are a major factor in the progress of WorkAbility. The impact and importance of WorkAbility was recognized by the Federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and was named one of the top ten nationally acclaimed programs for youth with

disabilities in 1988. The continued overall success of the WorkAbility program, however, depends on the dedication and resourcefulness of project directors, job developers, teachers, parents, and employers.

For WorkAbility I, II, and III, the goal remains to provide a comprehensive employment preparation program which enables special needs students to secure and maintain unsubsidized employment in the private and public sector. The primary focus of the model is to actively involve employers, parents, educators, and community and agency support personnel in the planning, training, and placement of students thereby promoting their improved community integration and vocational independence.

The state level organization of WorkAbility provides support for: a) local staff inservice training, and b) student assessment, curriculum design and implementation, student evaluation, employer contacts, and job training. Statewide partnerships with industry have created a lucrative support system for developing job sites locally. State WorkAbility committees with representatives from the eight WorkAbility regions gather, evaluate, and disseminate information useful to local projects. The State Government Relations committee has been instrumental in working with key state legislators to keep them informed of developments within the project. Legislative information is also passed to local projects and then on to parents who provide grass roots support for annual growth in the WorkAbility budget as the number of project sites increase. In addition, the committee gathers current information on other legislative issues that may result in competition for WorkAbility funding, speaking knowledgably to those issues and in

support of WorkAbility's effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

While WorkAbility is not the only secondary transition program in operation in California, it is by far the most comprehensive. All secondary students identified for and being served in special education programs qualify for service under WorkAbility. Ongoing state agency and legislative endorsement allow for the program's impressive growth in both numbers of project sites and numbers of students enrolled in each project. WorkAbility's future may include expansion to serve all of the identified "at risk" population in California's secondary schools. WorkAbility's success is demonstrating to educators that pre-employment and life skills training results directly in successful adjustment to independent adult living.

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